



FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative

Online Version: <http://feedthefuture.gov/article/what%E2%80%99s-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-agriculture-index>

What's Up with the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index?



Kashish Das Shrestha / USAID

This month, the **Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index** (WEAI) turns three years old. Launched by Feed the Future in partnership with the International Food Policy Research Institute and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative in February 2012, the WEAI is the first-ever direct measure of women's empowerment and inclusion levels in the agriculture sector.

In 2014, after the WEAI was used to collect data in 13 Feed the Future focus countries, we released a **baseline report** summarizing the results and showing which factors can either affect or result from efforts to strengthen women's empowerment in the agriculture sector. These baseline values are important because they provide a benchmark against which to measure future progress.

The baseline data revealed some interesting findings about the constraints women face in the agriculture sector. First, across the majority of Feed the Future focus countries and regions, the greatest constraints on empowerment among women working in agriculture are a lack of access to credit or credit-related decision making; excessive workloads; and a low prevalence of membership in groups (such as savings groups or farmer cooperatives) that can help support their endeavors. Low group membership is the primary constraint to women's empowerment in Asia, while access to and decisions on credit and workload are more severe constraints in East Africa and Southern Africa respectively.

The baseline report also shows that women's empowerment scores are associated with greater rates of secondary school completion as the highest educational achievement within the household. Higher rates of both breastfeeding and children achieving a minimum acceptable diet are also associated with greater women's empowerment scores.

Since the launch of the baseline report, Feed the Future has led trainings and workshops on the WEAI to enable U.S. Government staff and our partners to better understand and interpret the WEAI results. We've also re-introduced the **Gender Integration Framework**, a tool that facilitates a process to strategically examine programmatic needs and progress across key dimensions that contribute to women's empowerment in agriculture.

Even more exciting, the WEAI is gaining traction as a diagnostic tool for other country governments and partner institutions. For example, the Government of Bangladesh requested information on WEAI findings collected through a nation-wide survey regarding which regions face the greatest constraints to women's empowerment and how those constraints may impact outcomes like dietary diversity. This information gives policy makers the evidence base they need to develop sound, effective strategies for better agricultural development and nutrition.

Learn more about the WEAI or **watch a short webinar** for more information! Stay tuned for an upcoming Feed the Future blog on how the WEAI is advancing women's empowerment in the agriculture sector.